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INDIGENOUS ISSUES

Activities undertaken and information received in pursuance of Commission resolution 1996/41 on a permanent forum for indigenous people in the United Nations system

Report of the Secretary-General

1. In its resolution 1996/41 of 19 April 1996 on a permanent forum for indigenous people in the United Nations system, the Commission on Human Rights requested the Secretary-General to provide the Commission at its fifty-third session with a report on the activities undertaken and information received in pursuance of the resolution. The Commission also decided to continue the consideration of the possible establishment of a permanent forum at its fifty-third session, including the question of a second workshop on the issue.

2. The Secretary-General, in accordance with resolution 1996/41, has transmitted the report of the first workshop on the possible establishment of a permanent forum, held in Copenhagen from 26 to 28 June 1995 (E/CN.4/Sub.2/AC.4/1995/7), to Governments, indigenous organizations and intergovernmental and non-governmental organizations, inviting them to express their views. The comments and suggestions received were submitted to the fourteenth session of the Working Group on Indigenous Populations held in Geneva from 29 July to 2 August 1996.

3. At its fourteenth session, the Working Group discussed issues concerning such a permanent forum. It also discussed questions relating to the existing mechanisms, procedures and programmes within the United Nations concerning indigenous people. The report of the Working Group (E/CN.4/Sub.2/1996/21) notes that indigenous people's organizations and many Governments expressed the view that the establishment of a permanent forum was a high priority, and that the forum should be established at the highest possible level of the

United Nations with a mandate that covered the full range of issues of concern to indigenous people. Furthermore, it should not be a replacement for the Working Group on Indigenous Populations.

4. At the fourteenth session, the observer for Chile reiterated the offer of his Government to host the second workshop on the possible establishment of a permanent forum, which was welcomed by the Working Group.

5. At its forty-eighth session, the Sub-Commission considered questions relating to the possible establishment of a permanent forum under its agenda item entitled "Discrimination against indigenous peoples". In its resolution 1996/35 of 29 August 1996, the Sub-Commission requested the Secretary-General, in preparing his review of existing mechanisms, procedures and programmes within the United Nations concerning indigenous people, to take into account the views and opinions on the permanent forum expressed at the fourteenth session of the Working Group and the information received from indigenous peoples and communities, as well as from Governments. The Sub-Commission welcomed the offer by the Government of Chile to host the second workshop on a permanent forum and recommended that the Centre for Human Rights organize such a workshop in early 1997. The Sub-Commission also recommended that the permanent forum be established in the early part of the International Decade of the World's Indigenous People and that its mandate should include questions relating to all fields included in the programme of activities for the International Decade. The Sub-Commission further recommended that the Commission on Human Rights endorse the recommendation of the Sub-Commission that the Centre for Human Rights organize a second workshop.

6. In accordance with General Assembly resolution 50/157 of 21 December 1995, the Secretary-General conducted a review of the existing mechanisms, procedures and programmes within the United Nations concerning indigenous people (A/51/493), which he submitted to the General Assembly at its fifty-first session. The review is based on information received from Governments, relevant United Nations organs and bodies, intergovernmental organizations, indigenous organizations and non-governmental organizations.

7. The report states, inter alia, that although there is a noticeable difference in the level of activity among United Nations bodies whose mandates have a bearing on indigenous people's concerns, there is a growing interest and concern for indigenous issues among the different organizations and departments of the United Nations system. There are now a number of indigenous-related programmes and projects being implemented and planned by United Nations agencies. However, there exists no mechanism to ensure regular exchange of information between the concerned and interested parties - Governments, the United Nations system and indigenous people - on an ongoing basis. The information provided by the United Nations agencies does not indicate that adequate procedures are already in place to accommodate the effective involvement of indigenous people in the work of the United Nations.

8. At its fifty-first session the General Assembly adopted resolution 51/78, in which the Assembly requested the Secretary-General to transmit the review of existing mechanisms, procedures and programmes, to Governments, relevant intergovernmental organizations, and indigenous organizations for their comments for submission to the fifty-third session of the Commission on Human Rights. Any comments received will be contained in an addendum to the present document.